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## THE SOMERVELL EXPEDITION TO THE RIO GRANDE, 1842\*

STERLING BROWN HENDRICKS<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

The circumstances that prompted the fitting out of this campaign to the Rio Grande are briefly told in the narrative of S. B. Hendricks. The orders under which General Somervell acted are as follows:

Executive Department,<sup>2</sup>  
Washington, 3rd October, 1842.

To Brigadier Gen. A. Somervell:

Sir:—Your official communication from San Felipe under date of 29th ultimo, reached me late last night. I seize the first moment to communicate my orders.

You will proceed to the most eligible point on the South Western frontier of Texas, and concentrate with the force now under your command, all troops who may submit to your orders, and if you can advance with a prospect of success into the enemy's territory, you will do so forthwith. You are at liberty to take one or two pieces of ordnance now at Gonzales. For my own part, I have but little

\*The Introduction and editorial notes in this paper are the work of Mr. E. W. Winkler.

<sup>1</sup>Sterling Brown Hendricks was born near Courtland, Alabama, July 21, 1821. He grew up in Mississippi. Studied law under Samuel Marsh. Soon after obtaining his license to practice he emigrated to Texas, locating at Washington on the Brazos in January, 1841. In the fall of 1842 he participated in the Somervell Expedition, and immediately upon its termination wrote the account of the Expedition printed herewith. Meanwhile his family had removed from Mississippi to Bowie county, Texas. Therefore he, too, removed to that portion of the Republic, taught school for several years, and then engaged in merchandising in Harrison county. He represented Harrison and Panola counties in the Ninth Legislature, and after the expiration of his term of service entered the Confederate service as captain of a company from Harrison county. This company became a part of the Seventeenth Texas Regiment. At the organization of the Regiment he was elected lieutenant-colonel. While commanding the Seventeenth Consolidated Regiment in Louisiana, Governor Murrah appointed him financial agent of the State penitentiary. After the war, he returned to Harrison county, and engaged in merchandising and farming. He died December 11, 1909. Mr. Hendricks was a prominent Mason, a zealous Presbyterian, and citizen of more than ordinary ability.

The original manuscript of this narrative of the Somervell Expedition was recently presented to the Texas State Historical Association by Hon. Thomas B. Buckner, Judge of the Circuit Court, Kansas City, Missouri.

<sup>2</sup>*Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives, Seventh Congress*, 3-4.

confidence in cannon on a march; they will do on a retreat, where the forces are nearly equal, but they embarrass the advance of an army; and if pressed hard on a retreat, the great aversion that troops have to leave their artillery, may induce delay, and embarrass all the movements of the army. Our greatest reliance will be upon light troops, and the celerity of our movements. Hence the necessity of discipline and subordination. You will therefore receive no troops into service, but such as will be subordinate to your orders and the rules of war.

You will receive no troops into your command but such as will march across the Rio Grande under your orders if required by you to do so. If you cross the Rio Grande you must suffer no surprise, but be always on the alert. Let your arms be inspected night and morning, and your scouts always on the lookout.

You will be controlled by the rules of the most civilized warfare, and you will find the advantage of exercising great humanity towards the common people. In battle let the enemy feel the fierceness of just resentment and retribution.

The orders of the government of the 15th ult. having been disregarded by those who have gone to Bexar, in never having reported or communicated with the Department of War, the Executive will not recognize their conduct, and you alone will be held responsible to the government, and sustained by its resources, you will report as often as possible your operations.

You may rely upon the gallant Hays and his companions; and I desire that you should obtain his services and cooperation, and assure him and all the brave and subordinate men in the field, that the hopes of the country and the confidence of the Executive point to them as objects of constant solicitude. Insubordination and a disregard of command will bring ruin and disgrace upon our arms. God speed you.

I have the honor to be your obedient servant,

Sam Houston.

An important sidelight is cast upon this order by the following excerpt from instructions from Secretary of State Jones to the Texan Chargé d'Affaires Van Zandt at Washington:

The present policy of the government towards Mexico is to stand on the defensive. This policy has been strictly pursued as far as practicable, and will be continued. Texas has not the means necessary to carry on offensive operations against her enemy. The late Campaign under Gen. Somervell was not projected or recommended by the President. It was merely *sanctioned* to satisfy popular clamor, and as the volunteers under him wished to cross the Rio Grande and were determined to do so right or wrong to

clothe the expedition with legal authority that in case it was unfortunate, and our citizens should fall into the power of Mexico they could not be regarded or treated by the authorities of that Government otherwise than lawful belligerents acting under sanction of their own Government.<sup>3</sup>

The Secretary of State spreads the protecting aegis of his government a little too generously or else he was ignorant of President Houston's letter to Charles Elliot, British chargé d'affaires, dated January 24, 1843. Referring to the men who had refused to return with Somervell and who were made prisoners at Mier, President Houston said: "It is true that the Men went without orders; And so far as that was concerned the Government of Texas was not responsible, and the Men thereby placed themselves out of the protection of the rules of War."<sup>4</sup>

The incidents of the Somervell Expedition to and from the Rio Grande are narrated in greater detail by S. B. Hendricks in the account printed below than by any other writer known to the editor. Green (*Mier Expedition*), Stapp (*Prisoners of Perote*), and Big Foot Wallace (*Adventures*) were members of the expedition till December 19, 1842, when they quit Somervell to follow Fisher. John Henry Brown (*History of Texas*), Memucan Hunt (in *Telegraph and Texas Register*, January 18, 1843), and Hendricks returned with Somervell. Somervell made a brief report, undated, to the secretary of war, which is printed in the *Telegraph and Texas Register*, February 22, 1843.

#### HENDRICKS' NARRATIVE

Immediately after the irruption of a Mexican force into our country in the fall of '42, under the command of General Adrian Woll, many volunteers in compliance with government orders, repaired to the scene of action, but were doomed to disappointment in not meeting and chastising their insolent foes. This was the second time in the same year that a Mexican force had debouched upon our western frontier, killing and carrying off as prisoners

<sup>3</sup>Anson Jones to Isaac Van Zandt, February 16, 1843. *Diplomatic Correspondence of the Republic of Texas*, II, 127. The italics appear in the original.

<sup>4</sup>Extract of a letter from General Houston to Captain Elliot marked "Private" and dated at Washington, January 24, 1843, in Adams, *British diplomatic correspondence concerning the Republic of Texas—1838-1846*, p. 213.

some of our most valuable citizens, and throwing the country into confusion from its borders on one side to the other.

Therefore, it was thought indispensably necessary that the audacity of our enemies should be chastised and the evils of war multiplied on their own heads. To this end a day was appointed by General Edward Burleson and others who first engaged in the pursuit of Woll for the assemblage of troops at San Antonio de Bexar for an expedition to the Rio Grande. This day was the 25th of October, 1842. Many of those that first turned out, now returned home for the purpose (as they said) of equipping themselves for the coming campaign, but many in reality never again returned. The company of Capt. Saml. Bogart, though not one of the first, from distance and other opposing circumstances, to appear in the field, arrived there shortly after the most exciting events had transpired, but not in time to render any effectual service.<sup>5</sup> It was instantly resolved by this company to await the time appointed for the assemblage of troops, and be in readiness (although they were only prepared for a fall campaign) to march for the Rio Grande. In this resolution they were not influenced by a single motive of self interest, but by a sincere desire for the good of their country, and they really hoped and expected that government would take in hand and encourage the expedition in contemplation. For eight long weeks they waited for the concentration of troops and orders from government. It never was the intention of this company to go on the expedition save under government authority, and otherwise they never would have gone. During the eight weeks above mentioned, it required all the influence the officers of the company could wield to keep the men together and military discipline established. This was effected, however, and many others that arrived became members of and adhered to the company, so that when General Somervell arrived at San Antonio, Captain Bogart had near sixty men under his command. During the time above alluded to, there were repeated rumors afloat that the Mexicans were coming, and it was not even known that Woll was beyond the Nueces. Not a spy had been sent out to ascertain the state of things beyond Bexar, and a force could

<sup>5</sup>General Woll entered San Antonio, September 11, 1842, was defeated by the Texans on the Salado on the 18th, and began his retreat about the 20th (THE QUARTERLY, XIII, 292).

have come unexpectedly upon us at any moment. Captain Bogart went to and requested of Captain Hays a guide to accompany some eight or ten of his men to the Nueces, but a guide not being furnished him he sent his men alone. They went on Woll's route as far as the Nueces, and on their return reported the Mexicans as having entirely disappeared. From this time spies were kept out at a proper distance so as to give timely information of any advance the enemy might make.

Towards the close of October the troops ordered out by government began to make their appearance and everything gave promise of the expedition's going on. General [Alexander] Somervell shortly after [November 4] made his arrival at Bexar with Adjutant General [John] Hemphill, and steps were taken for the organization of the troops and putting everything in order. These steps, however, were tardily taken and but little or no promptness or energy was manifested on the part of the Commander in Chief. Some ten days or two weeks were spent in organizing two regiments when it might have been done in three days. At one time there were not less than twelve hundred men ready for the march had General Somervell ordered it, and they would have been joined by others, but they spent days in doing what might have been done in hours and suffered numerous squads and companies to leave and return home without permission or the slightest molestation. This example caught like wild fire, infusing itself more or less throughout camp, and every one who wished to leave felt himself at perfect liberty to do so. It proved the bane of all our operations and gave a death blow to our most sanguine hopes.

General Somervell's plan for the organization was as follows,—It seems that he was instructed by the executive to appoint Captain Hays to the command of the spy company, and at Captain Hays' request, Captain Bogart was detached with his company to cooperate and act in concert with him. These two therefore were placed in front as the two spy companies, with a positive understanding on that subject, which it will be found was most unjustly violated by the commanding officer. At the time the two companies united, Captain Bogart had about sixty men under his command and Captain Hays only eighteen. The men under Captain Bogart were anxious that their own officer should command, but inasmuch as Captain Hays had seniority of commission, they

finally agreed to march under his orders, provided certain conditions were observed, to wit: That whenever he went forward on any excursion, he was to take an equal portion of men from Captain Bogart's company in proportion to the number that he did from his own; and in his absence the two companies were to be under the command of Captain Bogart. This last condition however is nothing but military law, and yet it was not observed by General Somervell. Had Captain Bogart gone into the organization, as his friends wished him to do, he had as fair or fairer a prospect for the command of the Washington regiment than any other man in the field. Yet when urged on that subject to do so, he stated that he believed the expedition's going on would be much more sure if he did not become a candidate; that even if he was elected, strife and ill feeling would probably exist among some of the aspirants to office, and that he came out not as a seeker of office but to advance the interest of his country by all proper and laudable means. To this end his object was to harmonize all things, so as to secure the success of the expedition, even if he attained it at sacrifice of personal interest. These were the motives by which he was influenced, and in accordance with them he acted.<sup>6</sup>

The next step taken by General Somervell was the organization of two regiments. Colonel James R. Cook was elected to the command of one, and Colonel Joseph L. Bennett took command of the other. The subordinate offices were filled and it only seemed necessary to immediately take up the line of march. Notwithstanding all this, however, day after day elapsed, without any ostensible cause for delay and nothing was done. There was a sufficiency of provisions at San Antonio, which could in a short time have been prepared and furnished the troops for their march, yet General Somervell suffered this auspicious time to pass off without any movement whatever. After loitering about San An-

<sup>6</sup>Samuel Bogart was born in Carter county, Tennessee, April 2, 1797. He participated in the Battle of New Orleans, January 8, 1815. In 1818 he married and emigrated to Illinois; there he served in the Black Hawk War in 1832. The next year he removed to Missouri, and took an active part in expelling the Mormons from that State. In 1839 he emigrated to Texas, settled in Washington county, and commanded a company in the Somervell Expedition. He moved to North Texas in 1845, and played an important part in the development of that section; was elected to the Legislature in 1847, 1849, 1851 and 1859. He also held various positions of honor in the Democratic party during the years 1848 to 1857. He died March 11, 1861.

tonio for some time, however, we received an order to march as far as the nearest point on the Medina, on the Presidio route, and there wait further orders. This the men with alacrity obeyed [November 13], but were doomed to remain fully a week inactive at that point. General Somervell pretended to be waiting the arrival of one piece of artillery from Gonzales, which at length arrived, and then, after waiting ten days or two weeks for it, it was left behind. This was the course things took with us at the start, and such conduct broke the spirit of the troops, and discouraged alike the officers and the men. It was probably well, however, that the cannon was left from the fact that we never could have carried it with us, or if we had, could never have brought it back on the route we came. But waiting for and then leaving it was reprehensible in the highest degree.

At the Medina, General Somervell for the first time joined us, having prior thereto taken up his quarters in San Antonio. We now had orders to move down the country, some thirty or forty miles so as to intersect the Laredo road at or near a large mound about thirty miles from where the lower Rio Grande road crosses the Medina. On the second night after taking up the line of march, we encamped on a stream called the Tuscosa, opposite an old ranch. Up to this time we had had pleasant weather, but the night we remained here a heavy rain fell, which proved peculiarly disastrous to us. The next day was cold, wet and gloomy, and in our route we encountered a terrible bog which lasted for many miles. We were unable to ride, and many of our horses were lost and left behind. This circumstance was the death of our horses at the start, and rendered them utterly unfit for any active service at a subsequent time.<sup>7</sup> Whether General Somervell is to be blamed with this is not for me to say, but it is said that by going down the Tuscosa for eight miles below our encampment, we could have struck the Laredo road without traveling over any bad or boggy ground. Captain Hays, however, was the pilot and between him and General Somervell lies the blame! After toiling and dragging through this bog for two or three days, we at length struck the

<sup>7</sup>"The horses were so materially injured by their exertions to pass through this continuous deep and tenacious mass that they were ever afterwards unable, throughout the campaign, to make those quick marches essential to the accomplishment of the object of the campaign."—Somervell's report to the Secretary of War.



Laredo road at the mound above mentioned, and after going on for five or six miles, encamped on a small stream for the night. Here an unpleasant collision in feeling took place between the companies of Captains Hays and Bogart, which arose from the latter officer's ordering, as he had a right to do, Lieutenant McLain [Eph. M. McLean, 2d lieutenant] of Captain Hays' command, in the absence of Captain Hays, to encamp with his company on a certain piece of ground allotted for that purpose. This order Lieutenant McLain refused to obey, and some of his men even used rude and insulting language to Captain Bogart. Towards nightfall General Somervell made his appearance on the ground, and requested Captain Bogart to call down at the camp of Captain Hays, who had by this time arrived, and have some understanding of the matter in dispute. Accordingly immediately after supper Captain Bogart, accompanied by two of his officers of which I was one, repaired to the camp of Captain Hays, hoping that the affair would be properly adjusted. No sooner, however, had the General introduced the subject to be considered, than a number of Captain Hays' men crowded around, interrupted the course of conversation, and repeatedly and rudely insulted Captain Bogart even in the presence of the commanding officer. This conduct was not restrained by General Somervell nor did he manifest any disposition to treat Captain Bogart with even so much as the common civility due from man to man,—and all this without the slightest cause or any provocation whatever. The agreement entered into between Captains Hays and Bogart was recollected as was the General's promise by Colonel Wm. G. Cooke and others, and it was also known that it was but in accordance with military law and usage. Notwithstanding all this, his own solemn promise and the dictates of justice to the contrary, General Somervell, the next morning [November 30], acknowledging however that Captain Bogart had been guilty of no wrong and only required what was fair and right, ordered him to march with his company as the vanguard of the army, while Captain Hays marched in front with his as the spy company,—thus assigning the highest post of honor to those who had been the first to violate every rule of order or discipline that should be established for the government of an army.

When this order was delivered to Captain Bogart his own out-

raged feelings, which had thus been made subject to every rude assault that a ruffian set could offer, and the feelings of his company caused him to disobey it. He at once mounted his horse, and forming his company marched it immediately in front and prevented all attempts on the part of Captain Hays' men to head them. It was indeed, a beautiful and inspiring sight to see some sixty men on either side (for Hays' company had received an increase of number) all noble, fine looking fellows, well mounted, and thus marshaled trying to outstrip each other for the highest post of honor. Their march was over hills and hollows, through a wide and open prairie, and as they marched they seemed like two gloomy clouds, that in opposing columns, frowning darkly at each other. The lines were kept firm and fixed, no breach of files, and no disorder. Our pace was that of a rapid walk, at times changing to a trot. After we had thus proceeded for about four miles, the commander, who had been belaboring his steed for a good while to overtake us, rode up besmeared with sweat and almost foaming with rage, and again repeated his command to Captain Bogart. Our company was then halted, while the burly General with the rather worsted company of Hays moved on. Our intention was now to quit the field and at once return home; for this purpose I was sent forward to offer General Somervell the resignations of the officers of the company and to ask discharges for the men. This the illustrious General would not consent to, but used, as he thought, many reasons why our company should not be dissatisfied with the station assigned it. The only matter now left for the decision of the company was whether or not they should at once return home. Their feelings dictated this course, but when they reflected upon the course pursued by the commanding officer, they concluded that if they did so and any misfortune befell the expedition it would be perhaps attributed to their having quit the army and thus weakened it. This reason, although the company loathed General Somervell from their hearts, induced them to march under his orders, hoping by their conduct in scenes of danger to show that they had not merited the treatment they had received. However, charges were preferred by Captain Bogart against Lieutenant McLain and Sergeant Stokes [?] of Captain Hays' command for their conduct toward him, and the General promised a court martial on the Nueces, which court martial never

took place. From this place we moved on during the day and late in the evening crossed a little stream called the San Magill [San Miguel]. And after going about a mile farther encamped for the night in a beautiful island of timber in the prairie—The main body encamped on the San Magill—Hays' company in our front. From this point we moved on next morning [December 1] and at mid-day crossed the Rio Frio. On its western bank there is a lovely little rocky mound. This night we encamped on a small stream in the prairie eight miles from the Frio,—we had feared much before night that we would find no water at all. The army lay behind—Hays in front.

The next morning [December 2] we again moved on, and at noon came to where Hays had camped the night before. The prairie had caught from their fires after they left and had burned for some distance round. This night we encamped on a small stream within two miles of the Nueces, and the country around, though open and dreary, had an interesting and pleasing cast to a somber mind. There were hills around us on every side, but eternal desolation seemed to brood and slumber upon their gloomy tops, though immediately where we camped seemed a garden spot, while all else around was but a desert. Here one of Captain Hays' men, McDaniel, stayed with us all night, having been dispatched by Hays to General Somervell with the information that he had gone on with two of his own men and two Lipans, (Flacco their chief and another) in accordance with his orders, to try and glean some information with regard to the state of things on the Mexican frontier. His company had halted on the western bank of the Nueces, waiting for the chief command. During the night we camped at this place, some of our men were alarmed by the appearance of something out of the lines after dark, which so frightened their horses that they immediately threw their riders and dashed into camp. A wolf, it was supposed, gave them the fright.

The next morning [December 3] we proceeded on our route and came to the bottom or swamp of the Nueces in about a mile, which was indeed most wretched. The mud was in many instances belly deep to our horses, and the water nearly swimming. The stream itself was greatly swollen, and although it was a cold, cloudy, and dismal day, we were under the necessity of preparing a raft and pulling our baggage over by ropes, after which we swam

our horses over and then swam across ourselves. Only one horse was lost in crossing this stream. We now proceeded on and struck camp in a few hundred yards of Hays' company, and turned our horses out on the prairie.

From the difficulty and trouble attendant on our crossing the Nueces we concluded that unless some arrangement could be made to expedite the crossing of the main army, great delay would unavoidably occur. We resolved therefore [December 4], to attempt the construction of a bridge and by felling trees across the stream and then piecing it, and throwing brush on, we managed to make a bridge, over which men, horses, and baggage could pass without difficulty or danger. In fact the crossing of the whole army did not occupy much more time than the crossing of our company did before the bridge was constructed. The plan as well as the construction of the bridge is to be attributed solely to Captain Bogart and others of his company. After the army had crossed over we remained at this place one day allowing our horses to recruit and wait for a report from Captain Hays. Late in the evening of the second day [December 5] after our stopping, however, our company received orders to march on until we should meet Captain Hays,—in obedience to which we moved on about four miles and encamped for the night, the army remaining on the Nueces.

In this part of the country, near the Nueces, both on the eastern and western banks, I for the first time beheld vast ramparts and towers of prickly pear that seemed to form walls and mountains in their terrible array. From the midst of many of these banks of prickly pear, young trees or saplings of the same nature were to be seen from twenty to thirty feet in height. The whole country had a peculiar appearance, presenting a view of boundless extent and of unbroken grandeur. Yet there was no beauty,—it was a profound and cheerless desolation. Toward the north the prairies stretched forth in broad perspective, and were only bound by the mists and shadows that would rise like clouds upon the view. Almost the only growth we saw or found was the mesquite which grew on every little stream and was our only resource for wood. During the night we camped here, the Lipans were with us, and about daylight next morning [December 6] we were surprised by one of our sentinels hailing and some one immediately after rode into our lines. This we found to be Flacco, the Lipan chief, ac-

accompanied by the other Indian who had gone with him. From them we learned that they had penetrated to Laredo, and that Captain Hays had succeeded in capturing two Mexican spies, one of whom was severely wounded by the Indians, and they reported that there was no Mexican force of any importance on or near the Rio Grande at Laredo. Colonel Bravo indeed, had a garrison of eighty men on the opposite side of the river from that place, but the troops of Woll were at Presidio above and those of Canales from Guerrero to Matamoras below. Hays had stopt with his men and the two prisoners about eighteen miles from us, on account of having lamed his horse in the capture of the Mexican spies. We now again marched on, and were soon overtaken by Hays' company, who informed us that the horses belonging to the army had stampeded the night before, and that the main body for that reason could not overtake us for some time. Hays' company now took its station in advance, though not out of sight of us, and we then proceeded on for some twelve miles, when we observed them in pursuit of something across the prairie, which was continued for some time, when we heard them firing ahead. When we came up we found that they had encountered some wild cattle, and had been fortunate enough to kill several. They were very fat and it was indeed a God send to us at the time. After proceeding about three miles farther, we came to a small stream of water, the first we had met with during the day, and as it was then late, cold, and raining, we concluded to encamp for the night. Hays' company proceeded on farther. When we had been here some hour or so, the main body of the army came up, and this night (excepting Hays' company) we all camped together.

Next morning [December 7] we again moved on, and in about three miles came to Hays and his company, and heard that the wounded prisoner through the carelessness of a sentinel had two nights before made his escape,—all efforts to find or overtake him had proved unavailing, and we were forced to the conclusion that he had managed by some means to get into Laredo. The sentinel was put under guard, and we again marched on, Colonel Hemphill having in the meantime delivered to the army a very nervous and eloquent address. We were now only about thirty-five miles from Laredo, and by making a forced march, at nightfall, we found ourselves within six miles of that place. When about thirteen

miles from Laredo, we had halted for a short time to recruit our horses, and prepare some food for ourselves,—however, but few fires were made for fear of the smoke. When we arrived within about four miles of Laredo, our road, which had heretofore been very rough, and rugged, began to wear plainer, and we could see Mexican cart tracks where they had been hauling wood. The road still became plainer and plainer, and about two miles from Laredo, we halted and lay upon our arms, waiting for our spies to return, who had gone out to ascertain the situation of things about town, and to report whether or not a passage of the Rio Grande were practicable.

The plan of General Somervell for capturing this important place was as follows: As we had been informed by the captured Mexicans, that Colonel Bravo with eighty men was in the garrison beyond the river, our distinguished commander concluded to send the front companies, Hays' and ours, with two others, across the river for the purpose of cutting them off. Should it be found impracticable to cross the river, Hays' company and ours were ordered, after going to the common crossing, which was below town, to march up under its eastern bank, near the margin of the water, until we should get opposite the public square, where we were to remain stationary until daylight, which was to be the signal for the whole army to enter the town—the main body having surrounded the place during the night. About three hours before day [December 8] our advance commenced, and after proceeding a short distance, we left the main road and took a route through the chapperell (the Mexican word for thicket) for the crossing of the river. During all this time we could distinctly hear the dogs barking and chickens crowing in town, and those of us who had never been on an expedition of the kind, thought that something was to be done, but were most sadly disappointed.

The whole country around Laredo is low and undulatory, with hills around at a few miles distant. The earth seems to be hollow and its surface is covered with rocks and chapperell. The hollows are concave and the pits and caverns are numerous. After we had proceeded some distance, our march was interrupted by one of the Lipans being thrown from his horse and severely wounded—his spear having entered his body. His wound was not dangerous, however, and he soon recovered. When we came near the river,

we rode into a deep cave or sink in the earth, which was within a quarter of a mile of town, and through which there ran a small stream of water, communicating with the main river at the crossing, which was immediately before us. The opening through the earth made by this stream was sufficient for us to lead our horses down it to the river, although we were some thirty feet below the common level of the earth. After we had penetrated through this subterranean passage to the river, Colonel James R. Cook, who commanded our part of the army on the occasion, made some feeble efforts to cross the river, but without anything like a fair trial, declared it to be impassable,—the next day, we saw Mexicans fording it at the same place on small poneys. It now only remained for us to obey the second part of General Somervell's order,—accordingly Hays' company and ours proceeded up the margin of the river, protected and concealed by its bank, until we came opposite the public square where we halted until day light. The other part of our force joined the main body of the army.

The banks of the Rio Grande, here and every where else, where I afterwards saw it, were steep and abrupt and looked as though the water had been wearing and washing them for many centuries. The river being low, there was a considerable distance between the abrupt rise of the bank and the stream itself, while all between was a shoaly beach, covered with sand and pebbles and, in places, with frowning rocks. We had not remained long stationary, before the faint streak of day began to gild the horizon, and we could hear the rising sounds of motion in town. From some ranches on the opposite side of the river, persons now began to come to the river for water, but they did not discover us until two women in a perogue started across. When they had got about half way, they discovered us, but it seemed to give them no alarm whatever, although they returned. The people now began to assemble on the western bank, in groups and crowds, and as it was the place of the garrison we thought it likely that they would give us a fire from their cannon, as they were reported to have two. About this time a little boy came down to the water on our side of the river, to water a mule, nor did he discover us until he had reached the water and Colonel B. L. McCullough was nearly at him.

From him we learned that there was no Mexican force in town, and that the garrison had retreated from the other side of the river.

It was now broad daylight and we at once proceeded to enter the place. There was no resistance offered, and we had hoisted our flag on one of the main steeples and had it flying for fifteen minutes, before our redoubtable General with the main force was to be seen. At last, however, he entered, and our parade, although our force was small, was by no means contemptible, for it requires but a few well mounted horsemen to make a brilliant show.

The Mexican authorities lost no time in placing the town at our disposal, and our distinguished General, after making out a requisition for our most pressing wants, marched us up the river for a mile and a half, where we halted for the purpose of nooning. We remained here some six or eight hours perhaps, refreshing ourselves, and allowing our horses to graze,—the Mexican white flags on the opposite side of the river, in every direction, flying in our faces all the time. Late in the evening we were ordered to march down the river on the same side we then were, for some four or five miles, where we were to encamp for the night. It had been expected by the whole army that at this place we would be ordered to cross the river, and the disappointment was great when they found it would not be done. This was to be attributed to General Somervell himself, and to the opposition of Colonel James R. Cook and other subordinate officers. Colonel Cook, with the assistance of his friends, wishing to oust the principal of the command and take it himself.

In our course down the river, we did not pass through Laredo, but left it a short distance to our right. Here we witnessed rather a curiosity—peach trees in bloom towards the close of the month of December. We had not proceeded more than a quarter of a mile, when from the rear the words came that the enemy were in sight on the opposite side of the river, and indeed, from the clouds of dust that were rising in that direction, it had the appearance of truth. Our army was halted and held in readiness, until we ascertained the cause of the alarm, which proved to be nothing more than some of our men returning, who had crossed the river early in the day to pick up horses—this privilege having been granted by the Mexicans. After this flurry we proceeded on our march, and an hour or two by sun in the evening encamped on a high hill, within three miles of Laredo, immediately below that place, and within a few hundred yards of the river, from the west-



ern bank of which, our position would have been exposed to a cannonade had a Mexican force engaged us. Immediately in front of our encampment was a deep hollow, through which we had passed in coming from Laredo, and on either side, but especially the northern, the rise was abrupt and steep, and the road in its passage had huge banks, bluffs, and caves on either hand, and through the hollow there ran a small stream called the Shackow. The circumjacent country was somewhat similar to that immediately around Laredo. During the first evening we remained here, we killed several beeves.

In passing through the hollow above described, one of our men was so unfortunate as to be shot dead by the accidental discharge of his own gun. He belonged to Captain Cameron's company and was buried with the honors of war. During this night the General placed out picket guards and used other precautionary measures, which were certainly not improper on the occasion. Our picket was sent in the direction of Laredo, to occupy a stand on the north side of the hollow before mentioned, and a part of said picket was placed above and below in or near the same hollow. Of this picket I had charge, and during the night, when sleeping with the men not on duty, a diabolical wolf had the audacity to run over me, as witnessed by the sentinel. I had lost some five nights sleep immediately before, and was not even waked by the circumstance. We had no alarm during the night, though our sentinel came very near firing on one of our men, who had stayed rather late in Laredo, and, in consequence was unprepared to give the countersign. Similar arrangements were made on the other side of the encampment, and Lieutenant McCullough of Captain Hays' company took command in that quarter.

The next day [December 9] we remained stationary receiving the supplies demanded by General Somervell of the Alcalde of Laredo, and the time and occasion were rendered infamous by the plundering done by some sixty of our men who visited Laredo. When the plunder was brought into camp, it is gratifying to state, that the officers almost *en masse*, moved in arrest of the proceeding, and the delinquents were forced to carry their ill gotten plunder and deposit it at one place, to be returned to its proper owners. It is but proper to state that but few men of standing in the army were guilty of this abominable act. The plunder when

deposited, made a pile the size of a good large house, and no doubt every thing that could be concealed was taken care of by these men, whose conduct was indeed, most infamous. Late in the evening of this day, we were ordered to move down the country, a council having been called in the meantime, without being able to obtain a concurrence of feeling as to crossing the river. The object of this movement is not known, but it is presumed the General's intention at that time was to return immediately home by way of San Patricio, as it was currently reported and by some believed (perhaps also by the General) that a Mexican force had marched on the upper route from Presidio and another from Matamoras below to intercept and cut us off. Our guide on this occasion had told us that he would take us to water in four miles, but we travelled until nine or ten o'clock at night, through a most terrible chaparrall, before we encamped and then did so without finding water. This night we spent without either food or drink.<sup>8</sup>

Early next morning [December 10] we proceeded on our route, and in about five miles came to water. Here we halted and prepared our food, and in the evening after a council having been held, it was determined to leave it to a vote of the men as to whether or not we should cross the Rio Grande. In the meantime we were overtaken by Colonel [P. H.] Bell, aid de camp to General Somervell, who had been dispatched the evening before by the General, to Laredo, to inform the Alcalde that the plunder taken at that place was at his disposal. Colonel Bell had with difficulty made his escape from Laredo, the Alcalde having to escort him to the suburbs, and he informed us that the whole of the western bank of the Rio Grande was lined at that place with rancheros armed and infuriated at the conduct of our men the day before.

"On the evening of the 9th, Gen. Somervell took up the line of march for home, but the dissatisfaction of a large majority of the army was so great at this unlooked for act of the commander that he was induced to change his determination on the following day, after having progressed some eight or ten miles homeward. Col. Tom Green of Fayette, who had been appointed Brigade Inspector, resigned with disgust at the conduct of the General on this occasion, and attached himself to Maj. Hays' command as a private. The whole force was then assembled by the General, and he announced his determination to proceed with the whole or a part of the force to prosecute the campaign, provided a sufficient number would accompany him for that purpose, and that for one he was willing to proceed with very few men, understood to be 500: that any part of the troops who were desirous to return home were at liberty to do so."—Hunt's narrative in the *Telegraph*.

This proves what evils lawless ruffianism is calculated to produce, and that the rules of civilized warfare should always be observed.

When it came to submitting the question of crossing the river to the army, we were all drawn up under a hill in the open prairie, and after a short address from General Somervell, in which he stated our situation and the differences of opinion among the officers, those who were willing to adventure all upon crossing were to ascend and form on the hill, while those who wished to return home remained below. Out of seven hundred and thirty men, about two hundred and thirty were for returning—the others resolved to hazard all upon another effort, ere they would resign the hopes with which they first engaged in this enterprise. From this place we moved on for some three miles and encamped for the night on a small stream of water and the next morning [December 11] the two hundred and thirty men left us and returned home. With these men I sent home the large horse I had been riding, and mounted a smaller one,—this I did on account of the terrible nature of the route and the situation of my horse. The object of General Somervell was to march down the river on the East side until he came opposite Guerrero, the next Mexican town below Laredo, when he proposed crossing and taking the place.

The whole country where we now were, was a wilderness, covered thick with chapperell, and presenting an appearance more dismal than anything I ever beheld. The soil was sandy, and about the only timber of any size was the mesquite, which was to be found alone on the small streams of water and lakes to which we came. The water was often very brackish, and the only forage we could get for our horses was the mesquite grass, which as it was the dead of winter, was very dry and afforded them but slight sustenance.

We were four days getting from where our men who returned separated from us, to the river opposite Guerrero. In the meantime we passed several pretty lakes and every thing presented a most picturesque and strange appearance. The night before we reached the river we encamped where there was sign of fires and an old camping ground.

For some three days past, as we ranged along down the river, we could see a range of mountains beyond it, apparently some one hundred or one hundred and fifty miles from us, and now as we

approached Guerrero, they became more conspicuous and presented the appearance of magnificent churches and towering edifices in the distance. There were mountains to the left, immediately before, and to the right of us—all though, no doubt, forming one chain or series of mountains, being perhaps a detached fragment from the giant Cordilleras. At the foot of these central mountains, as seen by us, is situated the city of Monterey, said to contain a population of fourteen thousand souls.

When [December 14] we came near the river six miles from Guerrero, we discovered one or two ranches off to our right, and in a short time came to several large herds of sheep, guarded by their shepherds. These men we seized and were informed by them that there was no Mexican force at Guerrero. General Canales, as they said, having marched all the troops toward Laredo, expecting to find us in that quarter. After some little difficulty in passing through the chapperell, we came to the bank of the river, and after some parleying with some Mexicans and Indians on the opposite side, which was conducted through the shepherds we had taken, our men holding themselves back to avoid being seen, we proceeded to attempt the crossing. This was effected by swimming our horses over and transporting our persons and baggage in two perogues, which we were fortunate enough to find at the river. No sooner were we discovered from the opposite shore, than every one instantly disappeared from that side and rushed for Guerrero. From the difficulty attendant in crossing, when three hours had elapsed, only seventy-five of us had succeeded in getting over,—about forty-five of our company and thirty of Hays'. Immediately on the western side was a Mexican farm in which the corn had just been pulled down, and lay in heaps on the ground. On this corn the men at once, and very imprudently, turned their horses, leaving them to feed and take care of themselves. In front of us, and about two hundred yards from the river, rose a considerable hill, and on its top were the houses inhabited by the Mexicans and Indians before alluded to. Between the foot of this hill and the river, lay the Mexican farm, enclosed by a brush fence. The side of the hill was covered thick with bushes and underwood, and near the houses were several brush fences. There were pits, bluffs, caverns and ditches, formed by time and washing rains, in every direction on the slope of this hill. On the right and left of the road,

after reaching the top of the hill, and at a distance of twenty or twenty-five yards from the road, were two small hollows, and the houses themselves were well adapted to shelter a defending force. On top of one of these houses a sentinel had been placed, when our advance crossed the river, to observe everything that passed in the country around. The story of the Mexican shepherds had acquired general credit, and no one even anticipated the appearance of a Mexican force. General T. J. Green and Captain Bogart immediately on landing, had proceeded down the road toward Guerrero for the purpose of observation. After proceeding about a mile and a half, as they rose a hill on one side, a Mexican force advanced on the other, and they met on top. The mutual surprise, as might be supposed, was considerable, but the pause was only momentary. Green and Bogart, wheeling their horses about, came thundering down the road, with the whole Mexican squadron in pursuit, shouting *Karahho* (God damn you) with a vengeance. They had not got far when Green's horse fell down, but soon recovered and distanced the Mexicans. Green, with one hand, reached back, and drawing from his coat pocket a broad red flag, held it fluttering behind him, cursing the Mexicans as he did so.

This seemed to dampen their courage, for fearing an ambushade, or for some other cause, they instantly came to a dead halt within about half a mile of the hill before us. At the first appearance of the dust rising from the Mexicans pursuing Green and Bogart, the sentinel on the house top had given the alarm, and after infinite difficulty from the confusion which every thing was in on the river, we managed to parade about seventy-five men, all that had then crossed, to oppose the Mexicans. Of this force forty-five were of our company, the remainder of Hays'. We had drawn up at the foot of the hill in bushes and gullies, when Bogart coming down, we marched up, at his order, and formed on the summit of the hill. Hays' men also did the same and formed immediately in the rear of us. The Mexicans, as I have said, had halted within about half a mile of us, their rear being concealed by a little knoll, which rendered it impossible for us to form any proper idea of their force. Indeed, we could not tell but what they were four thousand instead of four hundred which we afterwards found to be their real number.

At this time the sun was perhaps an hour high, and the Mexi-

cans proceeded to make the most showy and brilliant maneuvers before us, but without showing any disposition whatever to attack our position. At the first alarm our men on the east side of the river, had precipitated themselves across in every possible way,—some swimming their horses and others crossing in the boats. By nightfall, the whole force, with the exception of sixty men left to guard some of the horses, were on our side of the river. Hitherto the Mexicans had remained in front [of] us, and we now sent out pickets and took other precautionary measures to be ready for a night attack. It was proposed to General Somervell, by some, to make an attack on the Mexicans at once, because, they said, if we were not able then to contend with them we could not be so at any subsequent time. This the General declined doing for the very insufficient reason that we were not acquainted with the ground. Our men had during this whole affair, manifested the greatest desire to come in contact with the enemy, and fear seemed banished from the lines.

At daylight the next morning [December 15], the Mexicans, much to our disappointment, had totally disappeared, and not one was to be seen. In an hour or so however, the Alcalde of Guerrero, accompanied by one or two persons, presented himself at the out posts, and stated to General Somervell, that the Mexican authorities were willing to place the town at his disposal, and comply with any requisition he might make upon them, provided the place should not be pillaged. This was agreed to by the General and a moderate requisition made out, with the understanding that the supplies should be delivered, on the road one mile from Guerrero—the General having declined the idea of marching into town. During the first night we remained on the river at this place, we had both sleet and snow, but not enough to lie on the ground. We feasted on mutton, having a drove of sheep in our lines, of which we killed about one hundred and fifty.

After the Alcalde had left we proceeded to get all the men and horses over, who had not been able to cross the evening before, and as it now rained incessantly, we had not finished the transportation, and made arrangements for moving towards Guerrero until late in the evening. When we reached the place appointed for the delivery of the articles required, which was also to answer as a place for our encampment during the night, we found it to be

rather a suspicious position, having been marked out for us by Mexicans. The ground on which we stood was an inclined plain or gentle slope, perfectly barren and destitute of timber either for firewood or protection in case of attack,—only a few random bushes growing here and there. The Salado, a small river, flowed immediately in front of us, and on its bank the articles demanded of the Mexicans had been deposited. Beyond this stream and not more than two hundred yards from where we stood, and immediately in front of us, lay a range of hills, from which we could have been swept by artillery in every direction, without any possibility of our replying as the river was not fordable. Indeed, the whole position appeared so suspicious that the General declined occupying it and moved us some three hundred yards farther up the river, where we were somewhat protected by a rising knoll and numerous ravines and gullies in the ground. It had rained incessantly all the evening, and it had been dark for some time before we reached this ground. We here encamped and bivouac was most dreary. We had no chance to stretch our tents and lay upon the wet, cold ground with the rain falling upon us in torrents. The next morning [December 16] the rain still continued, and the General concluded to march us back to the river where we had crossed it. The articles delivered to us, having in the meantime been distributed. They were found to be but a shabby compliance with the requisition, consisting mostly of old, worn out things (many of the men were nearly destitute of clothing, therefore these articles had been demanded) and the one hundred horses required had not been brought in. We proceeded from this place back to the river, and immediately commenced recrossing, and by the night of the next day [December 17], the whole army, save Hays' company and ours had been transported to the opposite shore. The morning after this [December 18], as our companies came down to cross, we were hailed by Adjutant General Hemphill, who bore an order from General Somervell for our companies to move upon Guerrero, and in lieu of the one hundred horses they had promised to furnish, to demand five thousand dollars to be at once paid down. In default of their producing this sum, the General stated, in his communication to the Alcalde, that he should hold himself in readiness to march on the place with five hundred men. In compliance with this order, we immediately moved to—

ward Guerrero, but such was the danger apprehended from this step, that only thirty-five of our company, including officers, and seventeen of Hays' paraded for the Service—some indeed, were out on special duty, but many staid back through fear and cowardice. Guerrero is a place containing five thousand three hundred souls, and it did indeed, look somewhat adventurous to see fifty men boldly entering the town without any support.

However, when we made our appearance, not the slightest resistance was offered, and fear and timidity seemed to seize the whole population. General Somervell's communication was presented to the Alcalde, and he promised that every thing possible should be done to produce the amount required. In the meantime his council was summoned, by ringing the large and small bells of the cathedral, and our men were formed in open order around the inside of the public square, fronting the center,—our flag, all the time unfurled and flying in graceful beauty at the upper end of our line. We remained here waiting the conclusion of affairs for an hour and a half, our sentinels being mounted on some of the houses, from whence they could see in every direction around. Not less than four hundred Mexicans were to be seen in the place, but fear seemed to paralyze them, and they gathered about in groups like sheep, expecting to be slaughtered. They brought out corn and fed our horses for us in the public square, as only one or two of our men were permitted to leave the ranks at a time, and voluntarily brought us palonsas and cigars as a treat for the men.

After remaining here for an hour and a half, we were informed that it was impossible to raise the amount of money required by General Somervell in the place. The Mexicans said that their own armies had been quartered upon them, and had plundered them of nearly all they had. They, however, offered us seven hundred dollars, which was refused and the Alcalde, with his money, was brought with us to the river to hear the determination of General Somervell.

Guerrero is a fine looking and well constructed town, situated on the northern bank of the Salado. The houses are built of a kind of marble or stone, with flat roofs, surrounded by a wall. The streets and public squares (of which last there are two) are well laid off, and the whole place presents an appearance of ele-



gance and neatness. There is one cathedral in the place and several large public buildings. The inhabitants have fine gardens and throughout the place there are numerous groves of orange trees, that give it a most luxuriant and smiling appearance. I could not but regret that civilized people did not inhabit it. There are two strong forts in the place, and every house is a kind of fortification. Had they known how to fight, few, if any of us, would ever have returned to our friends, with thoughts and dreams of Mexico.

But to return to our story. When we reached the river and made our report to the General that chivalrous individual instantly flew into a rage, and cursing the Mexican Alcalde most unmercifully, ordered him to put back to Guerrero with his money, and never let him see or hear of him again. He did not however, think it necessary to carry out his threat of marching on the place with five hundred men, (being the amount of our whole force,) but the next morning [December 19], as we had all now recrossed the river, ordered us to take up the line of march for home, thus resolving to bring to a close this immortal expedition, which had certainly done any thing else but enhance the reputation of the General among the men. His order was for us to march so as to cross the Nueces where the Frio forms a junction with that stream, and from thence by Calvere's ranch on the San Antonio river, to Gonzales, where we were to be disbanded.\*

When this order became public, many brave and gallant men influenced by the purest motives, refused to obey it. They had marched under the orders of General Somervell until they had become tired, and now, that he was about to return home, without having struck a single blow or effected anything to the advantage of his country, they resolved to act for themselves. This was a gallant but unfortunate determination. Could we have all stayed together! Could we have acted as though we were influenced by but one

\*Order No. 64.

Head Quarters, Camp opposite the mouth of the Salado,  
East Bank of the Rio Grande.

The troops belonging to the South-Western Army will march at 10 o'clock this morning for the junction of the Rio Frio and the Nueces, thence to Gonzales, where they will be disbanded.

By order of Brigadier General Somervell, commanding the South-Western Army.

John Hemphill,  
Act'g Adj't Gen'l.

Soul! and above all, Could we have had a bold energetic and enterprising officer for our chief, what could we not have effected! But we had all despaired of this, and as we had now been eleven days on the Rio Grande, with a force deminished, discordant, and weak, we thought that prudence required our return. Two hundred of us returned with General Somervell, the others, three hundred in number, marched down the river under the command of Colonel Wm. S. Fisher, and General Thos. J. Green.<sup>10</sup> The fate of these unfortunate men is known by all. They marched down the river as far as Mier, forty miles below Guerrero where they fell in with and engaged a Mexican army of two thousand five hundred or three thousand men, and their heroic conduct in the battle which ensued, has given them immortality throughout the world. They surrendered at last, it is true, but it was after nineteen hours hard fighting, when their ammunition was expended, and after inflicting on the enemy an admitted loss of more than one third of their force. Not even then did they resign their arms, until the most honorable terms were granted them, which have since been most treacherously and basely violated by the Mexicans—a conduct which must reflect eternal dishonor [upon] their name. Of this gallant band some few have escaped; many have fallen by disease or violence; and a mournful remnant yet survives in chains and misery.

Our part of the army, after marching fifteen miles from the

<sup>10</sup>“On the morning of the 7th, previous to our taking possession of Laredo, Act’g Adjutant General Hemphill read an order from Gen. Somervell, who assured the troops that of the property taken from the enemy, there should be an equal distribution. I regret to state, however, that Gen. Somervell forfeited his pledge so far as related to the horses and mules which had been brought into camp. In some instances captains of companies would allow their men to detach themselves in small numbers and acquire for their purposes any number of horses and mules they could find, other officers denied their men this privilege, saying that all property thus acquired should be procured by regular details of men, and equally divided between officers and men; but when we commenced this second retreat Gen. Somervell failed altogether to conform to his pledge. The captains consequently, who had been most particular in requiring and enforcing discipline and subordination from their men in not allowing parties to leave camp, acquired no horses or mules to supply those of their companies whose horses were unfit for service. This produced great dissatisfaction and increased the prejudice and contempt almost universally entertained and openly expressed by the officers and men towards Gen. Somervell, and in fact I heard many of the officers and men declare their determination not to be commanded by and conducted on their march home by an officer incompetent as he had proved himself to be: consequently on the morning of the 19th, when Gen.

river, halted for two days [December 20 and 21] for the purpose of killing and providing sufficient beef to last us to the San Antonio river, there being vast numbers of Mexican cattle running in the woods. During this time I had a very narrow escape from being captured or killed,—having gone back to the river, above the place where we left it, for the purpose of picking up some horses for the footmen in our company, that is the men who had lost their horses. It was my object to reach an old rancho on the river, where I expected to find plenty of horses, and General Somervell had ordered us to take as many as we could find. For this rancho, I with two of our men searched long and closely, without being able to find it. At last we gave it up as a bad hunt, and commenced our return. We had not proceeded more than two miles, when we fell in with Flacco, the Lipan chief and several others. They were on the same business we were. Flacco informed me that about two hours before, he had seen some fifteen Mexican spies taking their course towards the rancho for which I had been hunting. Now, had I found it, we should have fallen in with these Mexicans and must inevitably have been either killed or captured, as our horses were entirely broke down. The ways of Providence are past finding out, and in this instance we alone owed our safety to the protection of Heaven.

After conversing with Flacco a short time, we proceeded on, and that night lay out alone, without fire, water or food. The next morning, about ten oclock, we reached the army, and the next day [December 22] took up our line of march. The supply of beef the men had been able to obtain was considerable, but not enough to last us in the prolonged march to which we were doomed. We

Somervell issued an order of march, Captains Fisher, Cameron, Eastland, Ryan, and Pearson refused obedience, together with most of the men under their command, and a large number of privates and officers of the other companies, the result was another division of our forces, which was then reduced to about 500 men. . . .

"Captain Fisher, to whose company I was attached, stated to me that he should only proceed with those of his command down the river far enough to procure horses for those of his company who were on foot, or whose horses were unable to carry them, and a necessary supply of food to take them into the settlements, that if he did not reach Washington county, from whence he had marched with his men, as soon as I did, that he expected only to be a day or two behind me. This was the expressed intention of all the officers who had separated themselves from the main command."—Memucan Hunt's narrative in the *Telegraph*, January 8, 1843.

"On the morning of the 22d [of December], after a council of war, it

had no road nor even path to pursue in our course through this vast wilderness, where man has seldom trod, and where, it is said, (though we saw none of them) spirits and demons roam at large. In this desert wild we were doomed to wander for many days, exposed to every evil, and suffering a thousand perplexing anxieties. On the third day after commencing our march [December 25] we heard the firing of the Mexican cannon at the battle of Mier, though without knowing the cause of it, as it could not have been less than eighty miles from us.

In our march, all order was abolished, and every man acted for himself. At night we would have no guard, and in the day all was confusion. The weather was almost all the time cloudy, wet, and intensely cold, and the chapperell and prickly pear gave us infinite trouble. Our pilot had literally to cut his way through the accumulated obstacles that opposed us. The provisions of many gave out, and to add to our perplexity, no one knew where we were, or to what point we were moving,—all were lost, and our march was somewhat like that of the Children of Israel through the wilderness of old. At last we hove in view of the "Pilot Knobs," of which I have before spoken, showing themselves faintly in the cloudy distance. On the eighteenth [eighth] day [about December 29] after commencing our march for home, we struck the Nueces, though unknowing to us, within four miles of the Laredo crossing. Had we known this fact, infinite trouble might have been spared us. The next day [December 30] we crossed the river by carrying our baggage over on a log and swimming

was determined to march into the city [Mier] and make a requisition upon the authorities for *necessaries* for the army, and that in no instance would anything like plunder be countenanced. So, after detailing a sufficient camp-guard, the troops were crossed over about 9 o'clock a. m., and addressed by Colonel Fisher in an appropriate manner. He called upon them to bear in mind 'that they were upon an honourable service, and not one of pillage, and that their country would look to them for a soldier-like discharge of that service'; 'that they had before them the recent plunder of Laredo, and the ill effects of that plunder; a plunder calculated to unfit a soldier in his duty, and to create anxious desires to go home.' It is a singular fact in our physical constitution, that if we become loaded with gains either justly or unjustly, whether these gains be in the way of a caballada or *baby-clothes*, it increases a home desire to such an extent that none can resist it. In the fresh example of Laredo and Guerrero, it was manifest that in the few who indulged in this way, their *amor patrias* was lost sight of in their multiplied excuses to go home, for it is certain that they did go home."—Green, *Texas Expedition against Mier*, 74.

our horses. None were lost in crossing the river, but we had now to encounter a marshy bog, two miles wide, and filled with numerous sloughs, which we were all day [December 31] crossing,—fifty horses were lost in this bog, including General Somervell's. We encamped for the night as soon as we struck high land, and here some of the men killed their horses and ate them, in which the General partook. On the next morning, we resumed our march, and after proceeding eight or ten miles, at about one o'clock, on the first day of the year, we struck the Laredo road.<sup>11</sup> The exultation was boisterous, and the shout proceeded from one end of our line to the other,—those in the rear catching it up, until, like one vast halleluha, it seemed to shake both earth and sky. We knew the road instantly by the appearance of the country, and the sign of our march as we went out. We now looked upon ourselves as redeemed, and pressed forward with renewed energy and vigor. Our hunters did something for us in the way of killing game, and starvation, in the strict sense of the term, was kept at a distance,—though many a poor fellow have I seen feeding on roots and herbs and eating the roasted skin of deer that had been killed. One thing I could not but observe,—those men who were most negligent in laying in supplies when they had an opportunity to do so, and who made least exertion now in hunting and killing game, were our greatest and most troublesome beggars.—I forgot to mention that Colonel James R. Cook, with about sixty men, separated from us beyond the Nueces, and that he was now ahead of us on a lower route.—Without any thing of much interest occurring, save the continued and increased starvation among us, we at last arrived at an old, uninhabited rancho on the Laredo road thirty miles from San Antonio. Here we found a drove of beeves that had been generously brought on to meet us from the Medina by two of Colonel Cook's men. These noble fellows knew our wants and generously exerted themselves to supply them. They deserve our thanks and eternal remembrance. We had for many days before this been feeding on hawks and rabbits, and almost everything else that we could find, but now at last we had a glorious

<sup>11</sup>“On the 30th and 31st ult., the army with considerable difficulty, effected a passage across the Nueces—on the 1st day of January, 1843, was ordered to be disbanded, the several captains being ordered to march their respective companies to the places of company rendezvous, and there discharge the same.”—Somervell's report to the Secretary of War.

feast, and spent nearly the whole evening and night in roasting and eating. Indeed, the only misfortune was that many of the men made themselves sick by eating too much.

My story is now nearly told. We proceeded from this place to San Antonio [arriving about January 4, 1843,] where we obtained a sufficiency of meal, and again had bread which we had done without for more than twenty days. We had suffered and endured all kinds of hardships; our clothes had been in tatters, and our minds and feelings oppressed by a thousand anxieties, but, thanks to our over-ruling Providence, we were now enabled to live again. We were here overtaken by some of our men who had gone down the river to Guerrero, and were informed of the unhappy fate of the brave men who accompanied them. Only about fifty or sixty escaped out of the whole number, these having been left to guard the boats and horses on the river while the others advanced on the town. This sad news cast a shade over our feelings which it was not easy for us to cast aside, and after remaining a few days at this place to recruit ourselves and horses, we returned to our homes, after an absence of five months.

My story is now told, and my history of this unwisely conducted expedition completed, in which I have tried to state facts as they were, without doing any one injustice, or in any manner perverting truth. If our country should ever see proper to authorize another expedition of the kind, let a general of experience and ability be placed at the head of the army, and instead of disaster and defeat, victory will crown her standard. All depends upon the enterprise and ability of the commanding officer, and if he is destitute of these important qualifications, no devotion or bravery in the troops, no energy or exertion on their part can atone for his errors or amend his faults,—he is the soul of the whole body, and without a soul, the body is dead.

Let us hope that the future efforts of our country will be attended with more success, and that her destiny will yet be all that is great and glorious.